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Robert Witcher

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If you are reading this instalment of NBC while eating a sandwich at your keyboard, you may conclude that we have lost touch with the ways in which people produced and consumed food in the past. The books under review here—on palaeoethnobotany and feasting—might encourage you to enjoy tomorrow’s lunch in the more convivial atmosphere of the common room or canteen. Meanwhile, desk-diners who read on, be warned that we finish with a volume concerning the inevitable bodily by-products of all this eating and drinking, and some of the unpleasant organisms therein. Caveat cenator!

Oats and beans and barley grow


Choice and diversity are watchwords of consumer society and one only need look at supermarket shelves to see that this applies as much to food as to any other commodity. In reality, however, we rely on a narrower range of plant and animal species than ever before. The contributors to Plants and people: choices and diversity through time, edited by CHEVALIER, MARINOVA and PEÑA-CHOCARRO, demonstrate that our ancestors made use of a much more varied range of food sources—diversity meant survival and choice meant something more profound than whether to have pizza or paella. This volume is the first of three resulting from the ‘Early Agricultural Remnants and Technical Heritage (EARTH) Programme’. Funded by the European Science Foundation, this programme promoted collaboration between archaeologists, ethnographers, historians, geographers and geologists from across Europe, as well as North America and the Middle East. This first volume deals with the diversity of crop choice; the second volume examines agricultural technology and the third, agricultural landscapes.

Following an introduction to the range of methodologies and source materials, such as archaeobotany, ethnoarchaeology, written sources and artistic representations of plants, the volume is divided into two main sections: ‘Food plants’ and ‘Food and beyond’. Each section contains three chapters, which are themselves comprised of up to nine stand-alone contributions bookended with editorial introductions and conclusions, plus consolidated chapter bibliographies. The wealth of material makes it impossible to name-check every contribution and instead we will have to make do with a taster’s menu. The section on ‘Food plants’ begins with synthetic overviews of the archaeobotanical evidence for crop cultivation in various geographical regions of Europe, plus the US Southwest and the Lake Titicaca Basin. Attention then turns to fruit trees, from the harvesting of acorns in California to the expanding evidence for the presence of lemon trees in first millennium BC Italy. Also in this section, Bouby et al. consider viticulture in southern Gaul, where the archaeobotanical evidence now clearly attests to the cultivation of grape vines from at least the fifth century BC and possibly earlier. The lack of evidence for the processing facilities associated with intensive viticulture, however, suggests that grapes were grown for local, small-scale production only. Consequently, Bouby et al. conclude that the Romans did not introduce the (southern) Gauls to viticulture, as claimed by Greco-Roman writers, but rather to the commercialisation of viticulture (more on this topic below).

Meanwhile, the contribution by Aumeeruddy-Thomas et al. draws a contrast between the domestication of cereals and fruit trees. The former is characterised by a clear progression from wild to domesticated. The differences between wild,
spontaneous and cultivated fruit trees such as fig and olive are much less clear, hence the practice of more diverse and flexible systems of arboriculture, illustrated here with examples from Morocco. Other interesting papers include two on the Canary Islands, both co-authored by Morales and Gil, exploring plant use in this fascinating island laboratory. Pre-Hispanic colonisers arrived with a limited range of crops (the only fruit tree introduced, for example, was the fig) and colonisers must have learnt to make good use of the indigenous plants.

The second main section moves on to the non-food uses of plants: fuel, temper in earthen construction, basketry, insecticide, and resin for boat caulking. There are also chapters on the use of plants in ritual and festive contexts, and on social status and identity. The latter include examination of the archaeobotanical evidence for the use of food plants at the late Iron Age and early Roman oppidum of Bibracte, France; Durand and Wiethold compare assemblages from across this large site, concluding that no single plant type can be associated with social status. Some new exotic species introduced during the Roman period, such as coriander, are present, but, the authors suggest, it is the evidence for wine (amphorae), and possibly meat, consumption that are more likely to be indicative of social status than plants (more on drink and status in Iron Age Gaul anon).

After all that diversity, any attempt at synthesis would be a tall order. Instead, the editors sign off with a brief conclusion that flags the need for diversity in the use of plants in the past and the reduction in the present day: “What was a dietary necessity sixty years ago in most of the European mountainous regions is now a family Sunday pastime” (p. 469). They also draw attention to the social and cultural contexts, alongside soil and climate, that shape the decisions concerning which plants to cultivate. For example, rice in northern Italy was promoted during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries under the influence of the Sforza family (Rottoli, p. 80); for earlier periods, we obviously lack the textual sources that help to illuminate these choices but, as with the increasing preference for rye in early medieval Europe (Rottoli, p. 78), it seems likely that such decisions are to be similarly explained by social and cultural factors.

With over 60 contributions spanning 500 pages and more than 40 authors from a dozen countries, the volume has the potential to make an indigestible meal. That it is not can be attributed in no small part to the generally high standard of language editing and, unusually for such a collection of papers, the provision of a detailed index. EARTH 1, along with its two companion volumes, will form an important and useful collection that should appear on every archaeobotanist’s bookshelves.

Or should that be palaeoethnobotanist’s bookshelves? The question arises in the context of the next volume under review: *Method and theory in paleoethnobotany*, edited by MARSTON, D’ALPOIM GUEDES and WARINNER. In their introduction, the editors tackle this issue of terminology (a long-running debate, see Buurman & Pals 1994). The editors’ suggested solution is that, in practice, archaeobotany and palaeoethnobotany are synonymous, with the former term preferred in Europe and the latter in North America. Some quantification for this assertion is provided by fig. 1.1 and it is certainly the case that the term palaeoethnobotany does not feature in the predominantly European *Plants and people*. Semantics aside, the editors spell out their aim to supplement rather than replicate the now standard text, *Current paleoethnobotany* (Hastorf & Popper 1988), with a volume that addresses topics and techniques that have developed over the past 25 years. These include correspondence analysis, niche construction theory and online data archives, as well as the analysis of starches and isotopes, aDNA and remotely sensed data. As such, the volume is wide-ranging but not a comprehensive overview. Nonetheless, the consolidated list of references, at over 130 pages, gives some sense of the scale of the enterprise.

The book is divided into five sections: ‘Formation processes’, ‘Recovery, identification, and data management’, ‘Quantification and analysis’, ‘Integration of paleoethnobotanical data’ and ‘Interpretation’. The individual chapters each begin with an introduction to the specific theory or method, a literature review with case studies and, finally, consideration of future directions. Here we can do no more than present a few select morsels, with some attention to those areas that do not feature significantly in *Plants and people*. Pearsall discusses pollen and phytoliths, with attention to the mechanisms by which they become incorporated into archaeological deposits generally, and onto the surfaces of archaeological artefacts specifically, including cooking, pounding and grinding. She emphasises the very different nature of pollen and phytoliths in terms of their biological character, dispersal and preservation. These
Review

differences complicate interpretation but also open up opportunities for integrated analysis. Key to this will be more experimental and ethnoarchaeological research to understand better the taphonomic processes at work. The chapter on stable isotopes by Warinner provides an overview of the method, along with a critical commentary on the possibilities and the limitations of the technique. In relation to the latter, she cautions against the indiscriminate application of isotope analysis and over-interpretation of its results in relation to dietary differences: “Stable isotope-based paleodietary analysis is at best only semi-quantitative, and the robusticity of current stable isotope models to accurately parse such fine isotopic differences has not yet been established” (p. 283). The technique, she argues, is at its most effective when it is used to discriminate between models based on palaeoethnobotanical or archaeological evidence: “Stable isotope analysis is most robust when the paleodietary hypothesis is clear and well-defined, the dietary alternatives are isotopically distinct, and the sampling strategy affords a comparative approach across time or space” (p. 289). None of this will be news to isotope specialists, but the chapter may help them to communicate the method’s pros and cons to (over-)enthusiastic colleagues.

The chapter by Wales et al. addresses ancient biomolecules, including aDNA. It tackles both the mechanics of best practice in recovering plant remains for aDNA analysis and surveys the state of the field, looking forward to the reconstruction of genetic traits that may facilitate the “resurrection of biomolecules that are currently extinct” (p. 313) in order to increase biodiversity or impart resistance to crops. The chapter on aerial and satellite remote-sensing by Casana provides an innovative attempt to broaden the palaeoethnobotanical toolkit with a landscape perspective. Brief but varied examples of the detection of field systems, hollow ways and water-management features in Europe, the Near East and South America are used to illustrate the potential. In contrast, Stevens presents a more detailed examination of a single case study—an inter-site comparison and interpretation of archaeobotanical assemblages from Iron Age and Roman Britain (in fact, the Roman period gets limited attention, so the chapter title is somewhat misleading). Stevens reviews classic debates about the interpretation of such standard archaeobotanical indices as weed seed to grain ratios in order to explore issues such as storage and processing and how these might relate to household and community organisation and to settlement patterns.

As an up-to-date companion to the standard text, this volume will make for useful reading—for non-palaeoethnobotanists, it is an accessible introduction to an increasingly diverse and specialised field—and for that very reason, it will be also be useful for palaeoethnobotanists as not many will be able to claim expertise in the full range of specialisms considered here. On a practical note, it has to be said that—physically—this is not an easy book to use. Pleading typographical layout notwithstanding, the small page dimensions combined with the book’s great thickness make this a two-hand tome; note-takers may require an amanuensis.

Eat, drink and be merry


“[U]ntil the Industrial Revolution, there may have been no other more powerful engine of cultural change than feasts”. With this bold statement on the first page of The power of feasts: from prehistory to the present, HAYDEN sets out to document and explain feasting, from ‘simple hunter/gatherer’ societies through to the industrial present; there is also a chapter on primate food sharing by Suzanne Villeneuve. Hayden

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describes the volume as a theoretical synthesis with illustrative examples; it is “unapologetically comparative because I am interested primarily in understanding recurring patterns in the dynamics of feasts and linkages to other aspects of culture that are important to archaeologists” (p. 3). These other aspects include such staples as social complexity, inequality, domestication and monumentality.

Hayden adopts a ‘palaeo-political ecology perspective’ that centres on the relationship between food surpluses and feasting; surpluses were commandeered by ambitious individuals (‘aggrandisers’) in the form of feasts to advance personal status and power. But what exactly is a feast? As we shall see below, this is a subject of debate, but Hayden settles on “any sharing between two or more people of a meal featuring some special foods or unusual quantities of foods [. . .] hosted for a special purpose or occasion” (p. 8).

Hayden’s approach is concerned with the benefits and effects of feasting rather than the specific reasons for giving a feast; in practical terms, this means causes and consequences such as group solidarity and status display, rather than whether individual feasts are specifically associated with funerals, weddings, alliances or ancestors. Of central importance is the tenet that, although feasts are associated with social competition and ultimately inequality, feasting is not based on exclusion; on the contrary, “feasting is the sharing of food with others in order to create social bonds (or debts); that is, an inclusionary logic” (p. 13). Behind all of this activity are (pre)history’s movers and shakers: “ambitious, abrasive, aggressive, accumulative, aggrandizing people” (p. 17) who use feasts to advance their own self-interest. And successful feasts not only encourage more feasting but also the pressure for feasting on ever larger scales. The by-products of this “positive feedback dynamic” (p. 19), Hayden argues, are some of the key developments of the past 12 000 years: farming, political hierarchy and religion.

Make no mistake, Hayden does not see feasting as one of the central driving forces of human history. It is the central driving force: “Similar to massive galaxies, feasts act as cultural black holes, with aggrandizing hosts at the centre of the largest events surrounded by galactic quantities of economic materials spiraling into an insatiable event focus and giving off intense radiation as food and goods are consumed” (p. 21). Other metaphors—although more understated—include the comparison of feast-givers to modern-day entrepreneurs who indebt themselves in pursuit of long-term gain.

The chapters progress chronologically. Each in turn synthesises theoretical considerations specific to a broad societal category (e.g. ’simple hunter/gatherer’, ‘transegalitarian hunter/gatherer’) before presenting illustrative case studies including ethnographic classics such as potlatching on the Pacific Northwest coast and bear feasts in Japan and Siberia. The chapters draw out general patterns from the case studies and, finally, outline potential archaeological indications. Interspersed within this chronological structure are chapters on specific themes including domestication and horticulture.

Hayden presents his view of feasting partly through the systematic, often elegant, demolition of rival theories and partly through demonstration of the merits of his own. Hence, in relation to domestication, he argues that established explanations of population pressure, climate change and cognitive developments all fail to account for the early domestication of species such as bottle gourd, tobacco, hemp, chilli pepper, avocado, dog and turkey, which were either used for display (rather than food) or offered some sensuous or psychoactive experience. Similarly, the conundrum of why hunter-gatherers should have turned to cultivating crops—both more laborious and risky—is also explained by feasting; the switch was not to meet growing subsistence need but, on the contrary, to create ever greater surplus for feasting. Good harvests provided aggrandisers with the opportunity to enhance their self-interests; the only ‘cost’ of a failed harvest was a delayed feast (not starvation). From here, it is a short step to the idea that early cereal domestication was linked to beer not bread (on which issue at Göbekli Tepe, see Dietrich et al. 2012).

Hayden’s primary interest is early human social complexity and, as he moves towards early states and empires, he begs for indulgence in the face of the huge bibliography and his limited experience. Given the geographical and chronological sweep of this book, we can certainly grant his request. Nonetheless, scholars of the Roman world will be struck that the principal reference for this period is a book on Roman religious history published over three decades ago. The rich archaeological record for the ancient Mediterranean is a gift for feasting studies (for a recent discovery of feasting remains at Roman Sagalassos, see Poblome 2014) and in his discussion of the role of meat in traditional societies, including Rome.
Hayden has unknowingly strayed into a current debate about well-being and social-economic status in the Roman world. There are fruitful opportunities here for scholars of classical antiquity to relate their data to anthropological models such as Hayden’s and vice versa, as he himself acknowledges.

The penultimate chapter on ‘Industrial feasting’ surveys feasts in the contemporary world, from business receptions to children’s birthday parties (the latter two being “some of the most mystifying feasts I have witnessed”, p. 356). Hayden also offers helpful guidelines for both hosts and guests at modern-day feasts, including: “If you are a host, always make sure that there is more than enough food and drink and provide some outstanding delicacies, especially meats and alcohols”, and, reciprocally, “If you are a guest, show your support with work […] or impressive food contributions. Don’t be stingy” (p. 360)!

Hayden touches on a huge variety of themes of the broadest interest and importance, from domestication to state formation, and religion to prostitution (the latter two sometimes simultaneously). He also provides some eminently quotable material—summing up, for example, he asks “where would we be without feasts? It can be argued that we would still be simple hunter/gatherers” (p. 372). His book pulls together decades of personal research integrated into an overarching and compelling account of nothing less than feasting as human history.

The sensory component of feasts is a central theme for Hayden: dancing and dopamine; euphoria and endorphins; synaesthesia and serotonin. On the other hand, we do not get much sense of the food, drink and drugs consumed. The same could be said of the next volume under consideration: The never-ending feast: the anthropology and archaeology of feasting by O’Connor. Beyond this shared lack of emphasis on the bodily ingestion of food and drink, however, it would be difficult to find two books on the same subject with such different theoretical and methodological approaches. Indeed, O’Connor explicitly positions her approach in contrast to Hayden’s methodology, which is considered heuristically useful but which “tend[s] to flatten the cultural landscape and de-contextualize, rendering all feasts the same” (p. 13).

Instead, O’Connor draws on the work of Marshall Sahlins to pursue an ‘anthropology of history’—a synthesis of archaeology and history shaped by anthropology and focusing on symbolism and belief systems. If Hayden takes an etic perspective, O’Connor’s is firmly emic. Introductory chapter aside, there is no further discussion of theory and even the term ‘feast’ is left undefined as “precise meaning in each case will be clear from the context” (p. 25), a form of “operational definition” (p. 212). The table is therefore set for a very different type of feast.

At the core of the book are six chapter-length case studies starting in Mesopotamia and moving through Persia, Greece and the Mongol Empire to China and Japan. There is some overlap with the examples considered by Hayden (e.g. Mycenaean Greece and Zhou China), but the overall emphasis is on states and empires, which constitute only a minor part of Hayden’s book.

O’Connor’s case studies are more sustained than Hayden’s and, informed by historical texts, somewhat richer in the description of etiquette and ritual. There is also some fascinating comparative material; the chapter on Persian feasting, for example, concludes with an account of a feast given at Persepolis in 1971 by the Shah of Iran to celebrate the 2500th anniversary of the Persian Empire. A tent-city was laid out for the event, with 600 of the world’s great and good seated at a 57m-long table set with bespoke tableware, fed and attended by 160 chefs and waiters. But this lavish event, costing $22 million at the time, seems to have had exactly the opposite of the desired effect. It failed to consolidate the Shah’s hold on power, for within a few years he was toppled. One would love to have Hayden’s take on this example of failed aggrandising behaviour.

A running theme throughout is that many of the artefacts that fill the display cases of the world’s museums are the remains of feasting. Stripped of context and presented as objet d’art, we have forgotten about the wine, beer and other alcoholic beverages that these vessels were designed to hold. Continuing this theme, the Epilogue draws together the lessons from the case studies, emphasising the pre-eminence of drink in feasting: alcohol “was always a gift from the gods” and hence “drunkenness could be seen as a form of divine possession” (p. 206). As a result, “[t]he antiquity and primacy of alcoholic drink suggests that this is the deepest and most fundamental of human impulses; one that can be manipulated and appropriated by religion and the state, but which remains at the core of our being” (p. 209). In some ways, this statement does not sound that different to some of Hayden’s, but in practice, O’Connor provides too few generalisations about feasts with

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which to compare the two authors’ ideas. For all the introductory discussion of various theoretical schools, the basic distinction between the two approaches comes down to whether one takes an etic or emic perspective. Each has pros and cons: one seeks long-term behavioural continuities, but risks fitting the evidence to a predetermined expositional framework and neglects the significance of individual cultural expressions; the other aggregates a potentially infinite number of examples to illustrate the diversity of behaviour but risks lapsing into description without recognition or analysis of underlying connections and consequences. Or put another way, the first may lead to a monotonous diet lacking complete nutrition; the other is an all-day buffet, varied but unstructured and likely to end with indigestion. Doctors are likely to recommend a balanced diet.

For another angle on feasting, we can turn to *The Arverni and Roman Wine. Roman amphorae from Late Iron Age sites in the Auvergne (Central France): chronology, fabrics and stamps*, by Loughton. This enormous tome—the second in the new Archaeopress Roman Archaeology series, complete with its fresh cover design—draws on an analysis of a “sample of c. 155,000 amphora sherds, weighing 15 tons from c. 3,900 vessels and from sites spanning from the second century BC until the early first century AD” (p. 1). Large though these figures are, they pale compared with the quantities of Roman amphora sherds recovered from the Late Iron Age sites of Gaul more generally—for example, some 50 tons from the oppidum of Bibracte in Burgundy, the remnants of an estimated one million amphorae, containing perhaps 20 million litres of wine at this one site alone. That is one hell of a feast. But we are getting ahead of ourselves; it is a good 400 pages before the volume gets round to this particular topic.

Loughton’s aim is to describe and re-date the Republican-period wine amphorae from the Auvergne region of central France. During the Late Iron Age, this was the territory of the Arverni. A succession of rapid changes in the type, number and location of settlements between the second century BC and the first century AD provides a sequence of closely dated contexts that permit a detailed analysis of shifting trends in the importation of wine amphorae before, during and after the Roman conquest. Although focused on one relatively small region of France, the material requires a much broader perspective encompassing Italy, Spain and North Africa, plus some consideration of Britain too. Key to Loughton’s reassessment of established ideas about the organisation and significance of the importation of wine by Iron Age and early Roman Gaul is a wealth of new research across the Western Mediterranean that questions the standard classification of Republican amphorae (the well-known Greco-Italic and Dressel 1 types) and their provenance, distribution and chronology. Three chapters review the evidence for the various types of amphora. Loughton then presents the methodology used to recategorise the Auvergne material; to cut a long story short, it is a lot harder to differentiate a Greco-Italic amphora from a Dressel 1B than previously thought and an alternative classification using ‘rim classes’ based on a combination of rim height and angle of inclination is a more effective method. The following chapters, spanning more than 300 pages, then document, compare and discuss the Auvergne amphora assemblages in enormous detail complete with excellent bespoke maps, tables, graphs and many (many!) drawings of amphorae.

The final group of chapters move on to issues such as ‘Provenance’, ‘Distribution’ and ‘Modification, reuse, and deposition’. It is with the latter chapter that we return to feasting—although as only one of a number of possible explanations for the deposition of amphorae. Indeed, Loughton goes out of his way to explore the other potential routes to deposition, including a variety of functions such as the reuse of interlocking amphorae in the construction of drainage channels; this chapter also considers the different methods of opening amphorae—decapitation, piercing and either pushing the cork stopper in or pulling it out. The caution about interpreting every amphora sherd as evidence for feasting is welcome; the chapter is, however, more concerned with the evidence for reuse rather than deconstructing the feasting model, and the result is not entirely satisfactory as there is no reason that feasting and amphorae reuse could not have co-existed. Loughton is quite correct nonetheless to question whether sites with many amphorae, but little evidence for the consumption of food, were feasting sites or, more likely, transhipment sites where wine was decanted from amphorae into vessels more suited for redistribution inland.

But why was so much wine imported from the Mediterranean into Gaul? Loughton observes that large quantities of imported wine amphorae first appeared following an initial Roman military victory over the Arverni and the removal of their king.
Bituitus, in 121 BC: “[t]he end of kingship may have unleashed a cycle of political competition (and feasting) in which chiefs attempted to fill the vacuum” (p. 464). The huge quantity of amphorae involved is such that Loughton questions whether wine consumption was limited to the elite; indeed, he notes that amphorae are found on most sites—not only sanctuaries, but also farms, ‘agglomerations’ and oppida. Further, amphora sherds are widely distributed across these sites, suggesting that “a broad section of the population was drinking wine” (p. 466). For Loughton, all this seems to point away from feasting and from the association of wine-drinking with social competition; indeed, he carefully differentiates feasts from other practices, such as funerary rituals, special deposits in boundary ditches and “normal dining practices” (p. 466). Hayden, on the other hand, would presumably explain all of these practices as classic examples of incorporative feasting promoted by aggrandisers who brought together large groups of people for their own personal advantage.

In conclusion, Loughton speculates:

Did the elite avoid drinking wine during much of the late La Tène period because of its widespread availability and its popularity with the plebs? Perhaps, to begin with they preferred the drinks of their ancestors: mead and beer, and only later did they start to consume high-quality grand crus. Finally, with the decline in the large-scale importation of Italian amphorae during the course of the first century BC, wine may have been taken up by a nouveaux riche [sic] and its consumption confined to more restricted social contexts, such as funerary feasts and rites.

(p. 469)

The dynamic character of this interpretation is appealing, but it also assumes a particular notion of feasting, practised as a form of social exclusion by small and established elite groups, which then begs other questions about how and why so much wine was imported.

This volume documents a huge amount of primary research to collate and analyse material in extraordinary detail. The interpretation, particularly in relation to feasting, is less fully developed, but nonetheless the book will be an important point of reference for those interested not only in the Arveni, or the Auvergne region, but also those more widely concerned with the production, trade and consumption of goods across the Western Mediterranean.

From lunch to latrine

PIERS D. MITCHELL (ed.). Sanitation, latrines and intestinal parasites in past populations. 2015. xii+278 pages, 30 b&w illustrations, 12 tables. Farnham: Ashgate; 978-1-4724-4907-8 hardback £70.

Feasting, as Hayden, O’Connor and Loughton all highlight, is a sensual and embodied experience. But apart from a passing mention of vomiting (Hayden) and the recycling of amphora sherds as toilet wipes (Loughton), there is no discussion of the bodily functions that inevitably follow the consumption of food and drink. For that, we can turn to Sanitation, latrines and intestinal parasites in past populations, edited by Mitchell, which brings together archaeologists, historians and parasitologists to explore the archaeological evidence for the management of human waste and the consequences of poor sanitation.

The volume comprises ten chapters, with a brief introduction and conclusion by Mitchell. The core chapters offer varied, if not entirely balanced, fare. Contributions include McMahon on ‘Waste management in early urban southern Mesopotamia’. She discusses the earliest known toilet, from Uruk c. 3200 BC, with similar examples becoming more widespread during the third millennium BC. These deep pit toilets comprise stacks of interlocking, perforated ceramic rings up to 1m in diameter and sunk up to 12m into the ground. Located on tells, even the deepest pits rarely reached virgin soil thus avoiding groundwater contamination. Exactly what waste went into these pits, however, is less clear, as emptying them would have been a challenge; McMahon wonders whether they were intended for liquid waste only, with solid waste taken off site using smaller, portable vessels. Indeed, given that only a minority of houses could boast a latrine, this method must have been predominant; in the world’s earliest cities, households were left to find their own ways of disposing of waste. An important point made

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by several authors is that the provision of a toilet may improve the sanitation within an individual household, but the lack of similar provision at the community level meant that disease regimes would still threaten everyone.

Antinou and Angelakis present a study of toilets in ancient Greece from Minoan palaces to Roman public latrines in Athens with space for 62 users (clearly by Roman times, the latrine was not the ‘smallest room’). Taylor presents a comparison of the sanitation arrangements of ancient Rome and Roman London; in contrast, Hall and Kenward present a 2000-year longitudinal study of waste disposal at York, drawing on the city’s well-preserved waterlogged deposits. This study also acts as a bridge to the second group of papers that place more emphasis on palaeoparasitology with chapters on Africa and the Middle East, East Asia, the Americas and Europe (if you are still eating your lunch, feel free to skip the rest of this paragraph . . . ). For example, Anastasiou and Mitchell round up the archaeological evidence for parasites in Africa and the Middle East, exploring the implications for hygiene and health. Many parasites, such as roundworm, whipworm and pinworm use faecal–oral transmission, and their presence suggests poor sanitation or the contamination of water supplies. Some of these infestations are asymptomatic; others cause a variety of damage; some are potential killers. Sanitation aside, the presence of these parasites can also inform about diet (e.g. beef tapeworm and pork tapeworm), environment, and the migration of humans and animals. Notwithstanding the progress achieved to date, the authors note that fundamental research remains to be done; for example, comparing parasites amongst pre-Neolithic and Neolithic populations in the Near East to assess how change of diet, human-animal relations and urbanisation affected the parasite environment. Following these geographic overviews, a final paper presents ‘A first attempt to retrace the history of dysentery caused by Entamoeba histolytica’. This intestinal parasite still kills tens of thousands of people today; reviewing the evidence, the authors suggest an Old World origin, spreading to the Americas by the twelfth century AD, perhaps via Greenland or the Bering Strait.

The collection as a whole covers a lot of ground, but also leaves plenty of geographic and chronological gaps that prevent any clear sense of general patterns or trajectories; there are also some surprising bibliographical omissions, including Barry Hobson’s (2009) volume on toilets in the Roman world, which tackles very similar territory. Summing up, Mitchell suggests that achieving a comprehensive and integrated understanding of sanitation and health in the past is a long-term project that might take decades; this volume is a positive first step towards that goal.

As far as our journey from field to fork, and from table to toilet, is concerned, it seems only appropriate to conclude back in the fields where we began. One of the uses to which human waste has been repeatedly put is manure for field crops, and several authors in Sanitation, latrines and intestinal parasites observe that this practice values faeces as a useful commodity in its own right. Some things never change—where there’s muck, there’s brass!

References


Books received

The list includes all books received between 1 May 2015 and 30 June 2015. Those featuring at the beginning of New Book Chronicle have, however, not been duplicated in this list. The listing of a book in this chronicle does not preclude its subsequent review in Antiquity.

General

**Review**

**European pre- and protohistory**


**Mediterranean archaeology**


**The Classical and Roman worlds**


**JAMES CLACKSON.** 2015. *Language and society in the Greek and Roman worlds*. xv+204 pages, 9 colour and b&w illustrations, 3 tables. Cambridge: Cambridge


ANATOLIA, LEVANT, MIDDLE EAST


THOMAS E. LEVY, THOMAS SCHNEIDER & WILLIAM H.C. PROPP. 2015. Israel's exodus in transdisciplinary perspective: text, archaeology, culture, and geoscience. xxvii+584 pages, numerous colour and b&w illustrations, and tables. Cham: Springer; 978-3-319-04767-6 hardcover £85.50.

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Review


Britain and Ireland


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Review

Byzantine, early medieval and medieval


VILLE VUOLANTO. 2015. Children and asceticism in Late Antiquity: continuity, family dynamics and the rise of Christianity. viii+263 pages, 1 b&w illustration. Farnham: Ashgate; 978-1-4724-1436-6 hardback £70.

Other


Paperback, second and subsequent editions

